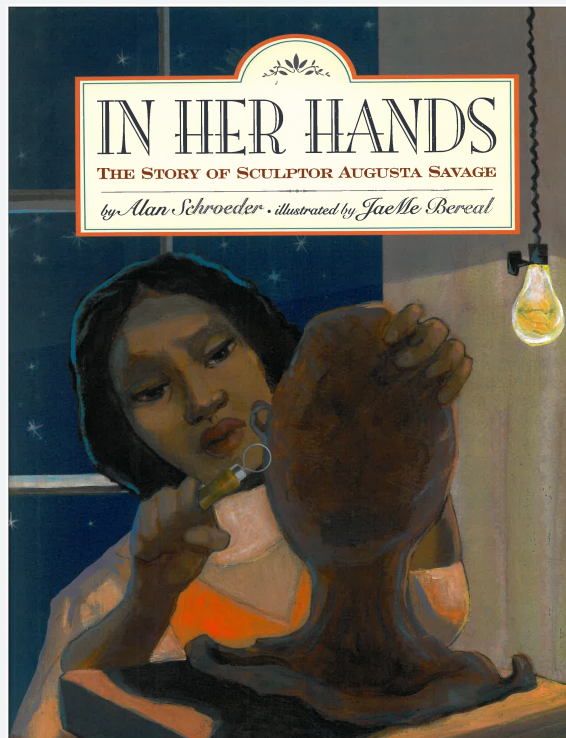


Second Reaction: Shape Your Life, Follow Your Dreams

Schroeder, Alan. *In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2009.

Buffy Rogers



Alan Schroeder writes delightful historical children's books. He forms with words the story of sculptor Augusta Savage the way she shapes her world with clay. He spins the bare facts into a wonderful illumination of her life. JaeMe Bereal breathes life into the story with her graceful illustrations of incidents relayed through Schroeder's skillful writing. I especially like Bereal's paintings of big events set in oval cameos.

One of the things I really appreciate about Alan Schroeder is his careful research of the facts known about the artist. As a teacher, I look for authentic information that is fun to read and relayed in a manner children understand. I enjoy the afterword where older readers partake of a fleshed out version of her story.

Schroeder keeps the information simple and relates the facts in a sympathetic tone.

He tells Savage's childhood story from the viewpoint of a child trying to understand the world grownups inhabit and pressure children to enter. Augusta's mother is her sympathetic, understanding intercessor. On the other hand, Augusta's rather overbearing father, set in stone with his rigid beliefs, finally softens and allows Augusta to pursue her passion to create in clay through some understanding between the mother and father. Schroeder tells children it is OK for Augusta not to understand. There are things children do not need to know, such as exactly how adults work out their differences, just that they do. Though Augusta had people mentoring her and helping her along the way, she was the one who pursued her dreams.

Augusta's adult life teaches many lessons. Though her trip to New York City seems to be financed on a hope and a prayer, this story encourages children to follow their dreams and passions. It teaches that risk and hard work pay off. It is beneficial to have parents who believe in you and teach you to believe in yourself.

When I come across a book that recounts the life of a little known woman artist, I am grateful to the author for choosing to invest in her history. Though she destroyed many pieces of her art, perhaps more of her work will be uncovered. It gives me hope that someone will pursue this stream of knowledge and widen it to the river that is her story.

I asked a couple of students and an artist friend to read and review the book.

Referring to the unhappy reaction of Augusta's father to her pastime of sculpting:

I liked the book but I felt like the beginning was too violent for a children's book. —Katelynn, student

The book was decent; it had a good, happy feel to it and a good message. Some of the illustrations were a bit boring. —Dylan, student

This student is a wonderful painter:

It was as beautifully written as it was illustrated, a very touching story, encouraging and filled with Augusta's personality. —Kenia, student

I connected to this story of the artist's early life through my own childhood memories of first sculpting, with assistance, a tiny bird's nest with eggs when I was in a preschool program and then later as a young teenager, finding a natural deposit of clay along a creek and spending part of a summer creating little figurines from my imagination. I still hold a very vivid impression of learning to roll little bits of clay in my hands to shape pea-sized eggs.

The story of Savage's challenge is both inspirational in her struggle to overcome adversity and of the importance of the timely mentoring she received along the way. Ultimately it is quite sad that she was not able to sustain her effort due in part to the painful internal conflict set up by her father's disapproval couched in the name of the religion he preached that ironically provided important subject matter for some of her work. The message was that sculpting was worthless play when instead she should be developing her mind and saving her soul. However, it seems that getting paid a certain amount of money justifies this activity!

As an adult I was most interested in the level of information about her that was provided in the afterword, but appreciate that it was intended for a much younger reader who surely would respond with interest to the storytelling employed by the writer and the skillful illustrations created by a contemporary African-American woman who in contrast has a very supportive family and is happily engaged in a variety of artistic expressions. —Anna, jeweler and teacher

About the Author

Buffy Rogers is a printmaker and teaches Art and Art History at Lafayette Jefferson High School in Lafayette, Indiana.